



The C4 subwoofer shares its name with a type of plastic explosive...apt!

ATC Concept 3 £4877 ★★★★★

FOR

Brilliant performance in every regard

AGAINST

Not exactly pretty...or small...or cheap!

VERDICT

A first-rate solution to the music and movies conundrum; if you've got the space and budget, give it a go

ATC'S SCM 12 standmount speakers won an Award in our annual gongs, and remain some of our favourites in their class, so, stick four of 'em together – as ATC's Concept 3 does – and the results ought to be impressive, right?

Not half! This is a terrific system. It's not pretty, it's hardly small, and you must use decent partnering kit to get the best from it – but, boy, are you going to love this package. It plays music properly, it relays details with astonishing precision, and it goes damn loud without stress, even at levels that'll have neighbours kicking your door down. It's an excellent choice for a system able to excel with both multichannel and stereo sound.

As you'd expect, the brilliant SCM 12s (two for front effects, two for the surround channels) play a big part in that success, but in some ways the other two elements in the package are even more impressive. First, the C3 Centre, a centre speaker so deceptively heavy that it gave one of our reviewers a bad back for a week. That's a reflection of ATC's obsessive attention to engineering detail: the C3 uses two hand-built 15cm polypropylene drivers (each of which has a huge 17.7cm magnet) as found in the SCM 12. These are mounted in a rigid sealed-box enclosure for minimal colouration. The only downside is that you'll need a very sturdy speaker stand to support your C3. In the end, we used a compact Mana equipment rack.

If you think that's big, then check out the C4 subwoofer. This gloss-black behemoth totes a downward-firing 30cm driver actively driven by no less than 650w, delivering 112dB of continuous output without distortion down to a subterranean 19Hz.

This means serious bass: it delivers a muscular, forceful and authoritative low-end that raises a grin while vibromassaging your sofa. Connect the subwoofer using balanced leads, which ATC can supply, and allow plenty of space, but if you want a system that can turn simple surround audio into a semi-religious experience, then the C4 subwoofer will provide.

Bring all these elements together, and you've a recipe for sonic fireworks. The clarity and clout of the naval battle in *Pirates of the Caribbean* is

exceptional, the sheer snap and weight of each explosion being relayed with blistering intensity. But it's not a bright, hard sound – even 'out of the box', with the drive units still stiff and in need of a run-in, the balance is fairly composed. Given time (and a stern thrashing) the performance matures, growing in stature with each passing hour. Perhaps the only 'flaw' is that you'll hear poor-quality mixes 'warts and all' – but that's hardly ATC's fault.

And don't forget – this is a system with serious music ability. As you'd expect, it's terrific in stereo, with or without the added support of the subwoofer. The balance is accurate: informative and yet wonderfully natural. Whatever you play, from Jet's retro-rock to Snoop Dogg's laconic raps, the SCM 12s involve you in the heart of the music like few others. This is a terrific system and given partnering kit of appropriate quality it's an excellent buy.

